

Beginning Research in Belgium

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SOME IMPORTANT DATES

1568–1648 The Eighty Years' War Low Countries divided into the northern United Provinces and the Southern Netherlands, more or less The Netherlands and Belgium, respectively

1556–1714 Southern Provinces under the rule of Spain, i.e. the Spanish Netherlands

1714-1797 Southern Provinces under the rule of Austria, i.e. the Austrian Netherlands

1794-1815 Austrian Netherlands invaded and controlled by France (although the Southern Netherlands were formally annexed by France, Austria did not relinquish claim until 1797)

1815-1830 Reunification of the Low Countries as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands

1830-1839 Belgian Revolution and independence

CHURCH AND CIVIL REGISTRATION

Records in the earliest time period are church records, primarily Catholic. Many will be in Latin, although some will be in French or Dutch aka Flemish.

In 1792 civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths was introduced in France. With the French taking control of the Southern Netherlands, this system was established in Belgium between 1795 and 1798.

Civil registration records include births, various record sets associated with marriage, deaths, and various indexes. The records were kept in duplicate sets. One set of records remained in the municipality, the other was sent to the provincial archive. Records less than 100 years old are protected by rights-to-privacy laws and can only be accessed by direct descendants.

The language of civil records will be French, Dutch, or German.

RESOURCES

FamilySearch.org <https://familysearch.org/> This site contains many church and civil records, many of which are indexed with images. This is a first stop when searching for civil registration in the 19th century.

How to find records in FamilySearch.org

1. Go to FamilySearch.org
2. Hover on 'Search'
3. Scroll down and click on 'Records'
4. The Records main page will appear. On the map click 'Eurasia.'
5. Choose 'Belgium.' This produces a list of indexed and image-only records. A camera icon indicates collections that include images.

6. Find a Collection – There are two sub-sections here: 1) 'Belgium Indexed Historical Records' where you can search for indexed records for a specific province (you may need to click on 'Show all 14 Collections' in order to find the province that you want). If you choose indexed records, you can enter a name into the search boxes in order to find a record of that person, and 2) 'Belgium Image Only Historical Records' where you must browse the specific collection.

The online collections include church, civil, census, and police records.

How to find records in the State Archives of Belgium

1. <http://search.arch.be/>
2. Hover on 'Search Engines' and click on 'Search Persons.' You should login. If you have not already created an account, follow the directions under the link 'Create an account.'
3. Once you have logged in, click on 'Personen.'
4. In the upper left-hand side of the page, there are abbreviations with which you can indicate the language you want, i.e. Dutch, French, German, or English. Although you probably are in the English interface, the search boxes themselves are in Dutch. You can change them to French or German, but not to English. This means that you will have to learn a bit of vocabulary in one of those languages.
5. Enter information about your person into the search boxes and click 'zoek in 31.573.968 namen.' When the results appear, choose your person by clicking on the magnifying glass off to the right. An indexed record will appear.

It is possible to see some original documents. When you are on the 'Personen' page, click on the tab 'FAQ.' Under the heading 'Hoe kan ik de originele akte raadplegen?' click on either 'Parochieregisters vóór 1800: <http://search.arch.be/nl/tips/98-parochieregisters>' or 'Burgerlijke stand: <http://search.arch.be/nl/tips/101-burgerlijke-stand>,' depending on whether you want church or civil registers. Now you will see a list of places that have digitized images. Click on your desired place. On the next page, click on 'gedigitaliseerde archiefdocumenten.' This will bring up thumbnail images. You will have to work through these to find your desired image.

For maps and gazetteers, download the handout to the class "Gazetteers and Maps for Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands" found on this page:

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Family_History_Library_Classes_and_Webinars

SOME HELPS

All these are on the FamilySearch wiki:

Dutch word list, "Netherlands Language and Languages."

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Netherlands_Language_and_Languages

French word list, "French Genealogical Word List."

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/French_Genealogical_Word_List

German word list, "German Word List." https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Word_List